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THE PROFESSION OF PRINCIPAL

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In February, 1921, a questionnaire was sent to all of the high-school principals of West Virginia. The original report of the results was made at the first annual meeting of the Secondary School Principals' Association of West Virginia, held in Morgantown, April 15-16. A revision of that report is here submitted in the belief that the conditions which it reveals are in the main typical of conditions generally and should be given wider publicity.

Part I deals with the principals' opinions of the present academic and professional status of high-school teachers and teaching; Part II, with teachers' meetings; and Part III, with the supervision of classroom instruction. The questions were designed to discover the principal's conception of his functions and the actual distribution of his time.

The high schools were divided, according to the latest classification of the state inspector, into first-, second-, and third-class schools. The right-hand column of Table I represents the composite results from all high schools regardless of class. Questionnaires were sent to 160 principals. The 107 responses were from eighty-four schools of the first class, seventeen of the second class, and six of the third. Several principals of third-class high schools wrote that their showings would be so unfavorable, on account of limited facilities, that they preferred not to answer the questionnaire.

In any study of this sort it is necessary to interpret certain answers in the light of one's best judgment. The meaning of some of the replies was so uncertain that they could not be interpreted at all, so they were listed as "indefinite." In other cases certain questions were left unanswered. This report is doubtless somewhat conservative because (1) most of the replies came from first-class high schools, (2) the natural tendency is for principals

whose conditions are unfavorable to neglect to reply, and (3) when an attempt was made to interpret an indefinite answer the principal and the school were invariably given the benefit of the doubt.

The questionnaire is here presented. The returns are summarized in tabular form, showing for each question the percentage of principals in the three classes of high schools making a given response.

PART I. TEACHER STATUS

1. What, in your opinion, is the chief academic deficiency in the present-day applicant for a high-school position?
2. What, in your opinion, is the chief professional deficiency in the present-day high-school applicant?
3. Which high-school subject do you think is most poorly taught? Why?
4. How would you suggest that the professional training of teachers for high school be made more effective?
5. In choosing a high-school teacher, how much weight do you in general give to the fact that the applicant has done at least four weeks of satisfactory practice-teaching under normal conditions and under daily supervision?
6. When possible, do you assign related subjects to teachers who must teach more than one subject?
7. In what high-school subject, or group of subjects, is the need for teachers greatest at present?
8. What, in your opinion, are the most vital problems that a new high-school teacher must face?

PART II. TEACHER-MEETINGS

1. How frequently do you have teacher-meetings?
2. On what day of the week?
3. At what hour of the day?
4. Average length of meetings?
5. Who presides?
6. How much time, on the average, is devoted to (a) administrative routine?
(b) constructive professional improvement?
7. Do your teachers keep reasonably well informed on current professional literature?
8. Do you in teacher-meetings have discussions or reports on recent professional readings?
9. Do you use printed or mimeographed material in teacher-meetings?
10. Is your faculty organized in committees for teacher-meeting procedure?
11. Do you in teacher-meetings capitalize exceptional local teacher-talent?
12. How much time are you able to put on preparation for teacher-meetings?

TABLE I

PERCENTAGE OF PRINCIPALS IN EACH GROUP OF HIGH SCHOOLS MAKING SPECIFIED
RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED

	CLASS OF SCHOOL			
	First	Second	Third	All
PART I. TEACHER STATUS				
1. Chief academic deficiency:				
Lack of specific preparation	48	51	3	48
Overspecialization	5	12	0	6
Lack of professional training, including practice-teaching	7	12	33	8
Inability to adapt subject to pupil	13	6	0	8
Lack of thoroughness in classroom	5	6	0	5
Lack of initiative	1	6	33	3
Lack of background of general information	9	0	0	7
No reply	13	6	32	15
2. Chief professional deficiency:				
Insufficient professional training	33	35	50	35
Lack of managerial ability	8	6	17	8
Poor attitude and lack of vision	15	6	0	13
Lack of specialization	10	6	0	8
Inability to apply information to pupils	14	12	17	15
Inability to understand boys and girls and their problems	8	24	0	10
Failure to improve professionally	7	6	0	6
No reply	5	4	17	4
3. Subject most poorly taught:				
Mathematics	6	6	17	7
English	60	71	17	59
History and civics	12	12	50	13
Sciences	13	0	0	12
Foreign languages	1	0	0	1
Vocational subjects	2	6	17	4
Indefinite or no reply	6	6	0	5
Reason for poor teaching:				
Lack of academic preparation	31	24	33	30
Lack of professional preparation	17	35	33	21
Inadequate physical equipment	4	0	17	4
Course unsuited to needs of pupils	25	35	0	24
Salaries too low for good teachers	1	0	0	1
Hardest to teach; conflicting elements	2	0	17	2
No reply	21	6	0	17
4. Suggested improvements:				
More concentrated professional training and practice-teaching	63	71	67	63
More subject-matter and less method	6	18	0	6
Give them a vision of the high school and its problems	7	0	17	8
Teach them honesty and industry	1	0	0	1
Have a system of expert classroom supervision	1	0	0	1
Better salaries for better teachers	1	0	0	1
Free tuition to summer schools	2	0	0	2

TABLE I—Continued

	CLASS OF SCHOOL			
	First	Second	Third	All
Make each one serve a half-year apprenticeship....	1	0	0	1
No reply.....	17	12	17	16
5. Weight given to practice-teaching:				
Great.....	26	29	17	26
Very little.....	35	18	17	31
None.....	8	18	0	9
15 to 50 per cent.....	27	35	33	29
No reply.....	4	0	33	5
6. Related subjects assigned:				
Yes.....	95	88	100	94
No.....	5	12	0	6
7. Greatest need for teachers:				
English.....	8	6	17	8
Science.....	45	35	50	43
Mathematics.....	5	0	0	5
Physical education.....	2	6	0	3
Vocational subjects.....	18	24	33	20
Commercial subjects.....	8	6	0	7
All subjects where men are needed.....	1	0	0	1
Music and drawing.....	1	0	0	1
Social sciences.....	5	0	0	4
Foreign languages.....	1	6	0	2
No reply.....	5	12	0	6
8. Most vital problems confronting new teacher:				
Administrative:				
First choice.....	50	35	33	47
Second choice.....	4	12	17	7
Third choice.....	0	0	0	0
Instructional:				
First choice.....	26	41	33	29
Second choice.....	24	12	17	21
Third choice.....	4	0	0	3
Professional attitude:				
First choice.....	5	0	0	4
Second choice.....	8	6	0	7
Third choice.....	5	0	0	4
Social attitude:				
First choice.....	17	12	33	17
No reply.....	44	12	0	5
PART II. TEACHER-MEETINGS				
1. Frequency:				
Daily.....	0	13	0	2
Semi-weekly.....	0	7	0	1
Weekly.....	56	47	67	54
Bi-weekly.....	26	13	0	24
Monthly.....	13	13	33	14
No regular time.....	5	7	0	5
2. Day of week:				
Monday.....	29	13	0	25
Tuesday.....	20	7	33	17
Wednesday.....	10	7	0	9

TABLE I—Continued

	CLASS OF SCHOOL			
	First	Second	Third	All
Thursday.....	5	7	0	5
Friday.....	7	7	33	8
Saturday.....	0	0	33	1
No specified day.....	29	52	0	33
Every day.....	0	7	0	1
3. Hour of day:				
Three o'clock.....	13	20	0	13
Three-thirty.....	24	20	33	24
Four o'clock.....	34	13	0	30
No set time.....	29	47	67	33
4. Average length of meetings:				
120 minutes.....	3	0	33	3
90 minutes.....	14	23	0	16
75 minutes.....	7	0	0	5
60 minutes.....	50	47	67	50
45 minutes.....	17	15	0	16
30 minutes.....	8	15	0	9
Indefinite.....	1	0	0	1
5. Presiding officer:				
Principal.....	77	67	67	75
Superintendent.....	19	25	33	21
Teachers or others.....	4	8	0	4
6. Time devoted to				
(a) Administrative routine:				
90 minutes.....	10	0	0	8
45 minutes.....	20	0	0	16
30 minutes.....	33	40	0	32
15 minutes.....	33	10	67	31
None.....	4	10	33	7
Indefinite.....	0	40	0	6
(b) Constructive professional improvement:				
120 minutes.....	3	0	33	4
60 minutes.....	21	38	33	24
45 minutes.....	19	0	33	17
30 minutes.....	29	50	0	30
15 minutes.....	17	12	0	14
None.....	11	0	0	11
7. Teachers' professional reading:				
Yes.....	90	80	100	90
No.....	10	20	0	10
8. Discussions or reports:				
Yes.....	65	77	67	67
No.....	35	23	33	33
9. Printed or mimeographed material:				
Yes.....	30	13	33	28
No.....	70	87	67	72
10. Faculty committees:				
Yes.....	12	0	0	10
No.....	88	100	100	90
11. Capitalize local teacher-talent:				
Yes.....	49	63	0	49
No.....	51	37	100	51

TABLE I—Continued

	CLASS OF SCHOOL			
	First	Second	Third	All
12. Time devoted to preparation for meetings:				
None.....	2	9	0	3
Very little.....	16	46	33	21
One hour.....	23	9	33	21
Two hours.....	20	0	33	18
Three hours.....	0	18	0	3
Four hours.....	2	0	0	1
Five hours.....	0	9	0	1
Varies.....	37	9	0	31
PART III. SUPERVISION OF INSTRUCTION				
1. Number of school periods per day:				
5.....	13	12	17	13
6.....	31	41	50	34
7.....	33	41	33	34
8.....	20	6	0	17
9.....	1	0	0	1
10 (?).....	1	0	0	1
Median.....	6.7	6.5	6.2	6.6
2. Number of periods per day spent in teaching:				
0.....	12	0	0	9
1.....	12	0	0	9
2.....	14	0	0	11
3.....	18	12	0	16
4.....	29	35	33	30
5.....	11	35	17	15
6.....	5	18	33	8
7.....	0	0	17	1
Median.....	3.2	4.7	5.5	3.7
3. Number of periods per day spent in office work:				
0.....	2	24	33	7
$\frac{1}{2}$	1	6	0	2
1.....	23	29	50	25
2.....	30	18	0	26
3.....	18	0	0	14
4.....	4	6	0	4
5.....	2	0	0	2
After school.....	2	6	17	4
Indefinite.....	8	0	0	7
No reply.....	10	12	0	9
Median.....	2.3	1.5	1.0	2.1
4. Number of periods per day devoted to supervision:				
0.....	5	24	0	7
Less than 1.....	13	24	0	14
1.....	33	12	50	31
2.....	20	17	0	19
3.....	12	6	0	10
4.....	5	0	0	4
5.....	1	0	0	1
6.....	2	0	17	3
All the time.....	1	0	0	1

TABLE I—*Continued*

	CLASS OF SCHOOL			
	First	Second	Third	All
Indefinite	2	0	0	2
No reply.....	5	17	33	8
Median.....	1.5	1.3	3.5	1.4
5. Enough time for supervision:				
Yes.....	20	6	0	17
No.....	79	82	67	78
No reply.....	1	12	33	5
6. Clerical assistance:				
None.....	74	88	83	77
One period per day.....	1	0	0	1
Stenographer.....	1	0	0	1
Office assistant or secretary.....	5	0	0	4
Two full-time secretaries.....	1	0	0	1
One-half day.....	2	0	0	2
Assistant principal and one secretary.....	1	0	0	1
Student stenographer.....	4	0	0	3
Commercial pupils.....	2	0	0	2
Commercial teacher, 45 minutes per day.....	1	0	0	1
"My wife assists me".....	1	0	0	1
Teachers help make reports.....	1	0	0	1
"Only superintendent's clerk".....	1	0	0	1
Indefinite.....	1	0	0	1
No reply.....	2	12	17	5
7. Time spent on school work on Saturday:				
None.....	5	0	0	4
1 hour.....	4	6	0	4
2 hours.....	8	12	0	8
3 hours.....	9	18	17	11
4 hours.....	35	24	33	33
5 hours.....	5	6	33	6
6 hours.....	9	0	0	8
All day.....	13	24	17	15
Indefinite.....	8	5	0	7
No reply.....	4	6	0	4
Median.....	4.1	4.0	4.5	4.1

PART III. SUPERVISION OF INSTRUCTION

1. How many school periods do you have per day?
2. How many periods per day do you teach?
3. How many periods per day do you spend in office work?
4. On an average, how many class periods per day are you able to devote to supervision of classroom instruction?
5. Do you feel that you have time enough for supervision?
6. What clerical assistance do you have?
7. On an average, how much time do you find it necessary to devote to school work on Saturday?

SUMMARY

The chief academic deficiency of the present-day applicant for a high-school position in West Virginia is lack of specific preparation, and the chief professional deficiency is insufficient professional training. Of the school subjects, English is most poorly taught because its teachers lack professional and academic preparation. The majority of high-school principals believe that the professional training of high-school teachers would be made more effective by more concentrated professional training and practice-teaching. Little weight, however, is given to the fact that an applicant has done at least four weeks of satisfactory practice-teaching under normal conditions and under daily supervision. When possible, related subjects are assigned to teachers who must teach more than one subject. The need for teachers is greatest in the sciences. The most vital problems that a new high-school teacher has to face are administrative in character.

In the average high school, teacher-meetings are held weekly. Most frequently the meeting is held on Monday at 4 P.M., continues for one hour, and the principal presides. From fifteen to thirty minutes are usually devoted to administrative routine. In general, the teachers keep reasonably well informed on current professional literature and report on these readings in the faculty meetings. The average faculty is not organized in committees for teacher-meeting procedure and does not use printed or mimeographed material in the meetings. About one-half of the principals capitalize exceptional local teacher-talent on the program. The average principal spends less than one hour in preparation for the teacher-meetings over which he presides.

The average high school has seven periods per day. The principal teaches four periods per day, spends two periods in office work, devotes one and one-half periods to supervision of classroom instruction, feels that he does not have time enough for supervision, has no clerical assistance, and finds it necessary to work a half-day on Saturday.

These returns indicate that certain conditions which obviously hinder the principal in the performance of his administrative duties are prevalent among the high schools of this state. There is

evidence that the conditions which have operated to produce the situation confronting these officers are in part the outgrowth of the limitations and restrictions under which the principals are compelled to work, and in part the result of lack of professional preparation or of professional vision on the part of the principals themselves. The remedy, it is clear, is to be found in the development of a different conception of the function of the principalship.

Theoretically at least, a principal is employed to do what others either cannot do or have not the opportunity to do. He should, therefore, be afforded the means of capitalizing this special ability and opportunity. It is a short-sighted policy which compels the highest paid member of the faculty to do the work which requires little training and no special ability, such as handling the keys, running the stockroom, and keeping the attendance record and other office records. A principal is entitled to an opportunity—to enough salary, time, and assistance—to perform thoroughly his true function—supervision. But every privilege carries a responsibility. If a principal cannot account for the opportunity he has, he cannot justify a petition for more. Most school boards consist of reasonable, business-like members who can be appealed to on business grounds; and this is a business proposition. The only way for a principal to get more time for supervision is to show that he *needs* more time for supervision, and the best way to convince taxpayers and school boards that he needs more time is to show them what he has accomplished with the limited means already at his disposal. That is a slender weapon, but it is the only one he will have until he uses it to show that he has outgrown it.

The principal must prove that his is a technical occupation, worthy of only a professional expert. He must convince the public that education, like other professions, demands men trained to do their special work. As long as he can handle keys and run a stockroom better than he can supervise classroom instruction, he will continue to be the handy-man about the building; but if he can show as convincingly that he has increased the efficiency of his teachers as he can show that the bookstore has saved money, he will then have placed his position on its proper plane, justified his present opportunities, and furnished grounds for pressing his further claims.